



**For immediate release
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DCR TO CONTINUE DEVELOPING 104-MILE BIKEWAY WITH 99-YEAR-LEASE FROM THE MBTA

The Department of Conservation and Recreation plans to continue developing a 104-mile bike and pedestrian path in Central Massachusetts with a 99-year lease from the MBTA Board of Directors on an abandoned railroad bed.

The T's Board voted today to grant DCR the lease on a 26-mile stretch of abandoned railroad right-of-way between Waltham and Berlin. Pending future funding availability, the land is to be converted into a multi-use trail and be incorporated into the Mass. Central Rail Trail.

"We are extremely pleased and grateful to the T's board for granting us this lease," said DCR Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr. "The final 104-mile bikeway will truly be the backbone of the state bike and pedestrian trail system, linking numerous DCR parks, forests, local conservation lands, and long-distance hiking trails."

The Mass. Central Rail Trail corridor extends 104 miles between Waltham and Northampton; the former railroad line was shattered by a hurricane in 1938. Now, 70 years later, dedicated volunteers, property owners, government agencies, and businesses are partnering in 24 communities to develop the corridor as a key off-road, multi-use public path. Twenty-one miles are already open to the public.

"Multiple benefits are realized as a result of today's action by the Board of Directors," said MBTA General Manager Daniel A. Grabauskas. "While preserving the corridor for future public transit needs, the Commonwealth, in the interim, provides open space with environmental and health benefits for the communities through which the rail bed traverses."

A portion of the existing corridor that is already open includes DCR's Norwottuck Bike Trail, which runs between Amherst and Northampton. DCR is in the process of redesigning this popular 10-mile corridor for full restoration. The Executive Office of Transportation, through the Massachusetts Highway Department, is partnering in this restoration effort, with \$4 million in federal funding already in place to do it.

In a letter last week to state Transportation Secretary Bernard Cohen, chairman of the T's Board of Directors, Sullivan said, "One of the most critical segments of this 104-mile corridor

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is the 26 miles from Waltham to Berlin. ... DCR looks forward to taking on the leadership role in designing and developing this 26-mile section of the Mass Central Rail Trail. We are pleased that this project has already engendered support from surrounding communities, and we look forward to an open community process to advance this ambitious initiative.”

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The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), an agency of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, oversees 450,000 acres of parks and forests, beaches, bike trails, watersheds, and dams, in addition to 278 bridges and miles of roadways. Led by Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr., the agency’s mission is to protect, promote, and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural, and recreational resources. To learn more about DCR, our facilities, and our programs, please visit www.mass.gov/dcr. Contact us at mass.parks@state.ma.us.